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Tajuk : MRSM Betong Students Win Gold Medal At Prestigious Science Competition.

## MRSM Betong students win gold medal at prestigious science competition

By SHARON LING

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**KUCHING:** An innovative idea to turn used plastic bottles into material for making bricks has earned two MRSM Betong students a gold medal at a prestigious science competition in the United States.

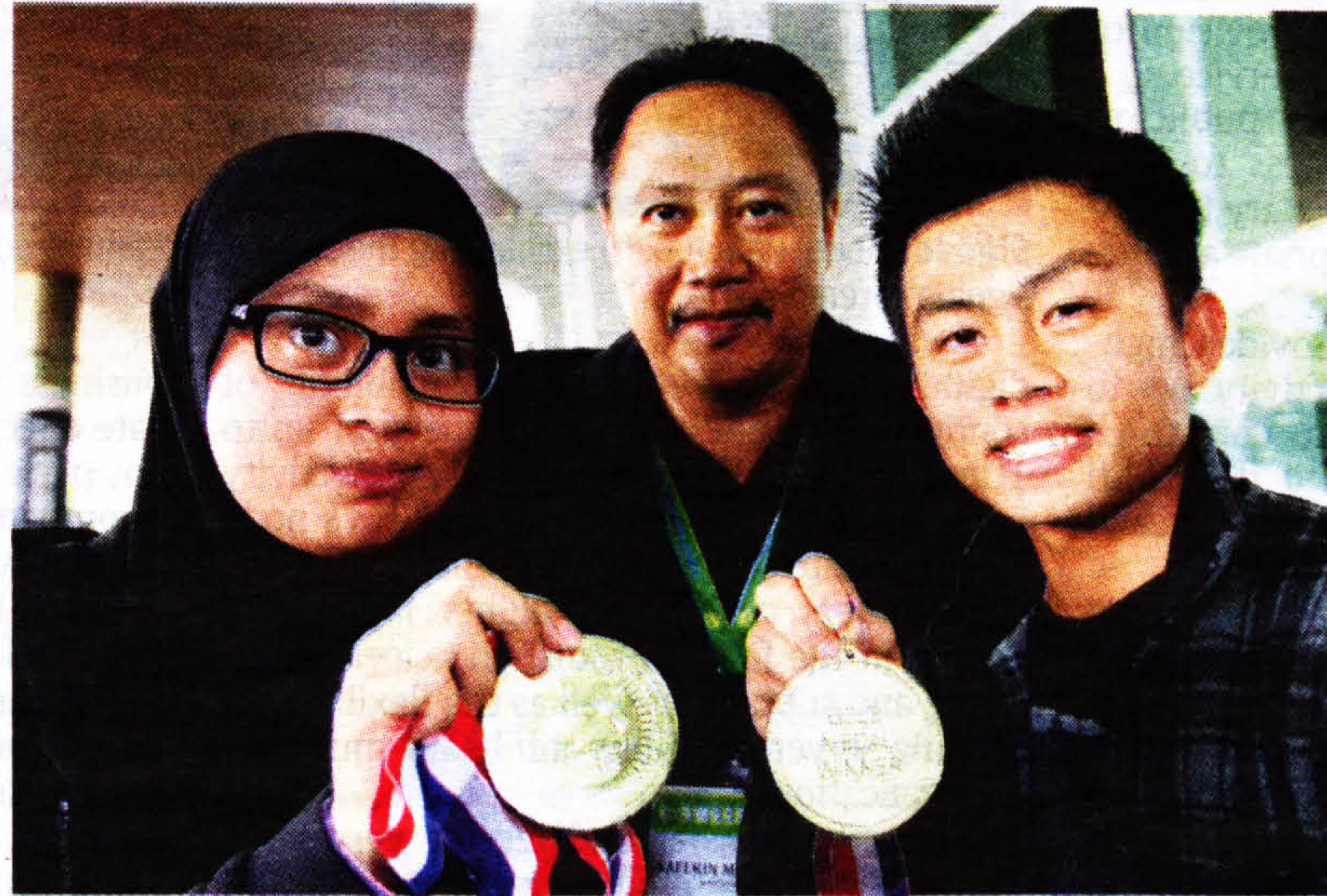
Wilson Mujang Nyuwak and Sharifah Badriatul Afiah Wan Madihi, both 17, won the prize at the recently-concluded International Sustainable World Energy Engineering Environment Project Olympiad (I-SWEEEP) 2013 in Houston, Texas.

They were among 10 gold medal winners in the engineering category, besides being the only Malaysians to receive the top award. Of four other Malaysian entries, two won bronze medals and the remaining two honourable medals.

I-SWEEEP is an international science fair focusing on energy, engineering and environmental projects by high school students, with the aim of promoting alternative solutions for a sustainable world.

This was the second international award won by the duo. They had also received a gold medal for their project at the 41st International Exhibition of Inventions in Geneva, Switzerland last month.

MRSM Betong teacher Saffrin Mukhar Mohd Salleh, who accompanied the students to Houston, said their participation in I-SWEEEP was



**Superb showing:** Sharifah and Wilson, accompanied by teacher Saffrin Mukhar Mohd Salleh, showing their gold medals upon arriving at Kuching International Airport yesterday. — ZULAZHAR SHEBLEE / The Star

good exposure for them.

“Even though they come from a school in a rural location, they are able to compete with urban schools and others at international level,” he said after arriving at Kuching International Airport yesterday.

According to him, the judges at I-SWEEEP were impressed by the students’ project titled “The Potential of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) in the Production of Bricks – From Waste to Wealth”.

“The jury liked the idea of taking waste material — plastic bottles in our case — and recycling it into

something useful,” he said.

Saffrin said the students took about a year to research their project, which involved producing plastic powder from PET bottles to replace sand in making bricks.

“Initially we carried out the research at the school’s laboratory for about six months.

“Then we collaborated with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak’s (Unimas) engineering faculty under the guidance of Prof Dr Md Abdul Manan.

“With the better facilities at the university, the students were able to

produce data for their project,” he said.

He added that after this, the students would continue their collaboration with Unimas to fine-tune their brick product.

“What’s special about this product is that it uses waste material, so we’re helping to solve an environmental problem.

“Secondly, the students also came up with a design idea of interlocking bricks. With this interlocking concept, mortar is not needed in laying the bricks and this can save up to 25% of building costs.”

Meanwhile, Sharifah told reporters that she hoped their achievements would inspire teenagers to be interested in science and technology.

“We’re very happy and thankful that we won the gold medal. We’ve worked hard on the project, but at the same time we also put in a lot of effort in class so as to get good results in every subject,” she said, adding that they worked on the project outside class hours.

Wilson added that they did not know what to expect when they entered the competition as it was up to the judges to decide.

“We’re very pleased to get the gold medal. Hopefully, others Sarawakians can follow our footsteps and make Sarawak known in the world.”

He also thanked MRSM Betong and Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) for sponsoring their trip to Houston.